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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, PM, PM/HDP

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PARM PHUM PREF EAID CE LTTE

SUBJECT: ACTION REQUEST: Demining assistance for Sri Lanka

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 01/02/03 Fax

- (B) 02 Colombo 2022, and previous

¶11. (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified -- Please handle accordingly. Message contains an **ACTION REQUEST** -- Please see Para 8.

¶12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Mines/UXO are a serious problem in Sri Lanka. After a very successful stint, the U.S.-sponsored QRDF program ended operations in late 2002. Mission has recently learned that a follow-on demining program involving DoD-run training has been postponed. We request that Washington continue to push hard for the implementation of this program. We also request that Department examine putting in place other programs, such as the Marshall Legacy Institute's Mine Dog Program. We believe strongly that demining reinforces U.S. policy goals in Sri Lanka, and request that Department initiate a bottom-up review of how we can re-establish our presence in this key area ASAP. END SUMMARY.

¶13. (U) SCOPE OF PROBLEM: Sri Lanka has a serious mine/unexploded ordnance (UXO) problem. According to UNDP estimates, there are an estimated 100-150,000 mines in Jaffna. There also could be up to 400,000 mines in the Wanni region in the north, which is controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The degree of the problem in the east is not clear, but there are believed to be some mines and significant UXO. The UN estimates that 10-20 Sri Lankans are killed or injured in mine/UXO accidents each month. There are fears that these figures could spike due to the steady return of displaced persons (IDP's) to points of origin in the north and east. (Note: Since the peace process began in December 2001, over 230,000 IDP's have returned to their home areas and the figure continues to surge upwards.)

¶14. (U) U.S. EFFORTS: After approximately seven months of operation, the U.S.-sponsored Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF) wrapped up its work in Jaffna in late October 2002. At the completion of its operations, the QRDF had cleared to international humanitarian demining standards approximately 122,000 square meters, and removed 980 mines and 42 pieces of UXO. As reviewed in Ref B, the QRDF effort received widespread acclaim in Sri Lanka. While performing practical work that is allowing for the safe return of displaced persons to demined areas, the QRDF became a symbol of our support for the GSL's peace initiative and garnered highly positive press coverage for the U.S.

¶15. (SBU) The QRDF program was especially impressive in light of the fact that other donors have been slow to assist Sri Lanka, mainly because the GSL has not signed the Ottawa Convention banning the use of mines. While showing some signs of life of late, the UN program has yet to get off the ground in any significant way. In the meantime, the GSL and LTTE are implementing demining programs, but neither side is well-trained nor capable of clearing land to international humanitarian demining standards.

¶16. (SBU) NEXT STEPS: With the QRDF's departure, the next step in U.S. demining assistance was supposed to be a large-scale DoD-run training program for Sri Lankan military personnel and civilians, which was publicly slated to start as early as January 2003. The Sri Lankan government had signed off on this program and was looking forward to its start-up. We now understand, however, that implementation of this program has been postponed until later this year because personnel resources are needed elsewhere. While Mission understands there are other pressing needs internationally, Mission requests that Department continue to push hard for the implementation of the DoD-run program as soon as possible.

17. (U) Mission also requests that Washington examine putting in place other demining programs, such as the Mine Detection Dog Partnership Program proposed by the Marshall Legacy Institute (MLI). MLI President Perry Baltimore recently visited Sri Lanka and discussed his organization's proposed program with Mission, and government and international organization representatives. MLI's proposal seemed extremely sensible and was very well-received. (Note: Mission has sent SA/INS a fax containing MLI's latest update on its proposal.) In addition to the MLI proposal, we request that Department review other possible demining programs that could be implemented in Sri Lanka in short order -- and at least in the interim until the DoD-run training program is up-and-running.

18. (SBU) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: We believe strongly that demining reinforces our foreign and humanitarian policy goals in Sri Lanka by providing "quick impact" support for the peace process. Along the lines set out in Paras 6-7, we request that Department initiate a bottom-up review of how the U.S. can re-establish a presence in this key area ASAP. We would like to brief the GSL very soon on U.S. plans and would appreciate a response on what is feasible by January 15. END COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

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